

FAMILY REUNION AS AN EXAMPLE OF AN INVENTED TRADITION

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The objective of this article is to show that the issues pertaining to invented traditions and collective memory, which are widely debated these days, also occur on a micro-level. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1992) described the mechanisms of inventing traditions within larger communities, focusing on states and nations. The same holds true for the studies of collective memory, since they mainly focus on memory in the global, national and local dimension. The subject of research in this article is the ‘First Reunion of the Feret Family’, which was treated as an invented tradition constructed in response to the crisis of post-modern society. With the help of scientific theories from the field of broadly understood research on the past, I am going to attempt to try and present mechanisms and intentions of building tradition and memory in a family, which constitutes a basic social unit.

The analysis of the phenomena and processes taking place during the reunion was made possible thanks to observations carried out by the participant. During the reunion, I observed the reactions of the participants, listened to their comments and watched the emerging relationships between the family members. The collected materials such as the presentation of history, family chronicle and family anthem have all enabled me to analyze the mechanisms of inventing traditions and memory. The analysis of the ‘First Reunion of Feret Family’ will be based on theories established by researchers focusing on collective memory and tradition. The concept of invented traditions, proposed by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1992) will enable defining the reunion, as well as presenting its structure and objectives. The concept of collective memory introduced by Maurice Halbwachs (1992) will foster understanding of how an invented tradition impacts the organization of the collective memory of a family and

builds its identity. Referring to Jan Assmann's (2011) definition of cultural memory, one should bear in mind how the memory of the past manifests itself in material things and how these 'mementoes of the past' influence the shape of the invented family tradition. Finally, Waldemar Kuligowski's (2007) deliberations on the intersection of tradition and globalization enable reflection on the threats to the family and tradition posed by the contemporary world.

When considering situations where there is a need to create new traditions, Hobsbawm (1992) notes that this process is most likely to occur where there is rapid social change and where value systems and patterns of behavior are weakening. For a researcher, an invented tradition serves as a testimony of a transition and a symptom of problems, and its emergence serves to explain the complicated present. Waldemar Kuligowski (2007) presents episodes where local traditions intersect with global modernity and innovation. The scholar notes that tradition is a positive value that needs to be preserved, but at the same time he sees the need to adapt it to the contemporary world. If globalization is a social change that weakens value systems, it needs to be perceived as a threat to the family. In addition, sociology has put forward a thesis about the crisis of a post-modern family, which results from the gradual assumption of family functions by other institutions. Mirosława Marody and Anna Giza-Poleszczuk (2004: 215) identify two positions, which explain the dimensions of this family crisis. The first of them speaks not so much about the disappearance of the family, but about a change in its form. The second position concerns the crisis, which threatens the 'foundations of society' since the disintegration of the family stems from an individualistic system, where 'personal happiness supersedes the sense of loyalty and duty'. Thus, the crisis of the family, numerous migrations, distance between relatives, lack of knowledge about the family's past, as well as lack of contact between its members make the post-modern family lose its sense of unity.

'THE FIRST REUNION OF THE FERET FAMILY', OR AN INVENTED TRADITION

Hobsbawm (1992: 1) believes, that tradition is misunderstood, since 'which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented'. He defines an invented tradition as 'set of practices, normally

governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past' (ibid.). The link between the past and the present is established artificially; however, the past interfering with the present is interpreted in relation to current events. The most important feature of invented traditions is the repetition of certain practices.

The structure of the 'First Reunion of the Feret Family' was based on the establishment of a link between past and present. In order to foster the inner unity of the group, the organisers had to teach the participants about the history of the family, their ancestors and their place of origin. Some considerable time was spent on communicating the values that allowed the idea of a reunion as a cultural practice and the identity of the group to be sustainable.

The 'First Reunion of the Feret Family' took place on the 31st of March 2013 in Gościno in West Pomeranian Voivodeship. The event was originated by Krystyna Zielińska, who invited 67 family members to celebrate Easter together. While waiting for the meeting to begin, the participants took a look at the family tree. Everyone was warmly welcomed by the hostess of the reunion and received a pin with the image of the founders of the family and an information brochure containing family history, genealogy, family anthem and lyrics.

FOSTERING IDENTITY

Hobsbawm (1992) distinguishes three types of invented traditions that foster group identity, instil certain values and conventional ways of behavior, as well as legitimise and strengthen institutions. Wojciech Burszta (2004: 109-113) points out that shaping identity by a group using invented traditions is a conscious and voluntary process. Thus, one of the priorities for the organisers of the family reunion, was undoubtedly the intentional establishment of family unity in a symbolic manner. The first point of the event program was a structured and coherent narrative about the family, which comprised an introduction of all the family members and a presentation of family history using slideshow (fig 1.). At the outset, the photo of Maria and Władysław – the founders of the family who lived in



Fig. 1. Fragment of the slideshow (author's private archive)

Tuszków – was shown¹. This was followed by a presentation of their children – five brothers. The history and family of each of them was also shared with the guests. By doing so, the family founding myth, the past of the family and all 118 members of the family were presented.

According to Halbwachs (1992), knowledge of the past is essential to maintaining identity. The most important aspect of shaping this knowledge are subjective memories and relationships of individuals (Saryusz-Wolska 2009: 22), which in the case of the reunion became the cornerstone for reconstructing the family's past. While creating the program of the reunion, the originator had to remember the history of the family, based on memories and conversations with Czesław Feret. The stories were written in a chronicle, which was started at that time, and the moment of writing down the history of the family was pictured in a photograph, which was presented during

¹ Before 1951, Tuszków was located within the borders of Poland. It is currently located in Ukraine and is called Zabolottya. It used to be located between lying between Vorokhta and Belz on the river Richytsia.

the reunion. Conversations during the meeting showed how important the knowledge of the family's history is to the participants.

An important step in the process of identification of individuals with the group was the analysis of the family tree. Each participant was obliged to fill in the data regarding the descendants of Władysław Feret. By becoming aware of their common origin, family members found a basis for identification with the group. This function was also performed by the pins with the reunion logo. The image of the founders of the family became the symbol of the reunion, as well as the family, expressing the inner unity of the group, fostering its identity and a sense of belonging. Seeing the pins on the clothes of people who were strangers until moments before, the participants could see the image of their common ancestors. The portrait of Władysław and Maria Feret also became a symbol of the founding myth (fig. 2). The founding of a family, which is a common and ordinary event, was treated as a certain historical moment worthy of immortalization. The presented story has created an idealized image of the family. Traumatic events connected with the war, resettlement and the tragic death of Władysław (see: Bulzacki et al. 2006: 998) were somehow hidden under the banner of remembrance.



Fig. 2. Portrait of Maria and Władysław Feret – logotype of the Reunion (author's private archive)

The founding myth was also present in the anthem, which was written for this occasion, sung to the melody of *Ach, mazurskie, jakie cudne* [*Oh, Masurian, such a beautiful*]. Describing the process of creating identity, Hobsbawm (1992) indicated that state anthems are invented traditions. The Feret family anthem does not comply strictly with formal requirements and does not meet literary criteria. Despite this, the fact that the family has given it the function of a family anthem makes it possible to distinguish the family from other social groups and shape its identity. Referring to the type of invented tradition distinguished by Hobsbawm, the creation of the Feret family anthem is also an example of the strengthening and legitimization of the family institution.

The first words of the hymn explain the origin of the family, followed by a presentation of an abridged history of its ancestors, as well as a description of the characteristic, often humorous, features of each family.

Hey, this beloved Tusków, where the Feret family was born
From where five brothers went into the world to make their wives happy (...).
Here in Gościno in the head of Krycha our first reunion was born.
Take the example, repeat it and invite others to your homes.

The call to other family members featured in the first stanza of the anthem assumes that the reunion is a sign of tightening of the family ties – an act that is worth repeating. Pointing out that certain cultural messages are intentionally treated as worthy of the name of tradition, Edward Shils (1981) noted that it is a dynamic process, since it constantly recreates cultural messages and forms, while bringing about social and cultural change in the lives of citizens. Not only Shils, but also Hobsbawm (1992) and Kuligowski (2007) wrote about the fact that certain products are considered worthy of recording and repeating due to the belief of their age. However, the newly created concept of a family reunion does not refer to old times, patterns or traditions, but creates its own rules, which is a characteristic feature of the concept of an invented tradition. The anthem constitutes this tradition, referring to it as an example, an act worth repeating. The real impact of the lyrics of the anthem is evidenced by the numerous entries of the participants left in the chronicle, among which one can find invitations and hopes for further reunions. ‘Visit us often’, ‘Our door is open to everyone’, ‘When going east to Rzeplin, Lubycza Krolewska, Tusków, Belz and Lviv, don’t forget to visit

Okszów' – these were some of the entries left in the chronicle by the family members. These invitations were confirmed with exact addresses, telephone numbers and e-mail addresses. These examples illustrate Shils' (1981) view that tradition brings about social and cultural changes in social life.

INSTILLING VALUES AND NORMS

According to Hobsbawm (1992), invented traditions are also created in order to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior, as well as conventional behaviors. During the 'First Reunion of the Feret Family', members of the family were persuaded to act in a certain way through an appeal to the family and the Feret 2013 award ceremony.

The presentation of the story of the five brothers and their families ended with an appeal to the family, which reads as follows:

So, Ferets, all of you sitting here – remember:
 Don't let the kids forget.
 Send each other greetings and wishes.
 Invite each other to your weddings.
 Visit each other.
 Never allow this bond of ours die.

As a primary group, a family is responsible for primary socialization of its youngest members, which is why the reunion focused a great deal of time on convincing older family members about the need to share knowledge about the past and maintaining family relations. The memory of past events, passed on to the younger generations, is the only way to maintain a group identity. That is why the call on other family members to 'not let the kids forget' was placed as the top of the list of normative behaviors.

Halbwachs (1992: 252) emphasized the role of the older generation in shaping historical awareness among children, pointing out that the family is responsible for the first stage of shaping social memory. The researcher pointed to the important role of grandparents in this process, because 'they pass fragments of their own memories on to their grandchildren during the breaks in the ongoing family life'. Thanks to this process, other family members can get to know the past of the family and common history. This process also took place during the presentation of the history of the Feret family. The information about the death of Władysław Feret presented

during the family reunion served as a basis for outlining a broader context of the operations and attacks of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army on the Polish civilian population. On the other hand, the emigration of ancestors, which resulted from the changes in the Polish border as a result of the Yalta and Potsdam conferences in 1945 and the agreement regarding the border change in 1951, enables understanding of the shape of Europe in the aftermath of World War II. The realization that certain historical events have had a real impact on the fate of the family, enriched the family's knowledge of history.

In turn, the call to 'visit each other' is also a message in support of maintaining family ties, which also features a normative image of the family, which is formed at the moment of marriage, it grows and dies (Marody, Giza-Poleszczuk 2004: 186-187). This theory is reflected in the way in which individual families were presented, with key role being played by wedding photographs. The image that dominated the presentation of individual families is a proof of the normative postulate of how the process of its development should be carried out. Wedding photographs were followed by photographs of various sacraments, such as baptism or first communion, which presented the participants the 'fruit' of marriage.

An interesting point in the program was the Feret 2013 awards ceremony (fig. 3), which includes a clear catalogue of normative behaviors. The statuettes were awarded in the following categories: making the family name famous, remembering about wishes and seasonal greetings, honorary representation at the reunion. Family members walked on the red carpet, to the sound of a fanfare, to collect statuettes depicting the founders of the family. The most important award was a statuette for keeping the family ties alive, which was presented to the originator and main organizer of the reunion – Krystyna Zielińska. Thanks to her efforts, everything that she did created a family bond between the participants of the reunion, which served as the foundation for building the identity of the whole family. The award in this category suggests the importance of the desire to keep in touch with family and imposes an informal obligation on the participants to maintain ties and this invented tradition. The most effective tool for this is memory.

COLLECTIVE AND CULTURAL MEMORY

The concept of 'collective memory', which was introduced by Halbwachs (1992), aroused the greatest interest in the 1970s. As some researchers



Fig. 3. Awards ceremony (author's private archive)

claim, Halbwachs has never precisely defined and explained the theoretical foundations of this concept (Gedi, Elam 1996). One can therefore speculate that the issues of communication in her research originate in the blurred category introduced by the precursor. Nowadays, the methodological and terminological diversity in memory research is the result of the interdisciplinary character of this issue and an approach conditioned by individual disciplines. The authors of the book *Modi memorandi* attempt to address the problems of contemporary deliberations on memory. They define collective memory as 'ideas shared by members of a social group about its past; cultural creations created within a memory group' (Saryusz-Wolska, Traba 2014: 346).

The relationship between invented tradition and collective memory in the context of the 'First Reunion of the Feret Family' is bilateral, because the invented tradition shapes the memory of the group, and memory is the foundation on which the invented tradition was built. The recollection of the story of the five brothers determined the knowledge and memory of the ancestors and the past of the family. This knowledge was conditioned by the social group itself, which created the image of the past. Individual participants could not have an individual memory of the family's past, because they simply did not witness it. However, the efforts during the reunion created a collective memory of the past. According to Halbwachs (1992), memory is the most effective tool to maintain one's own identity, On the other hand, this identity and the desire to strengthen family ties sparked

during the reunion are the main reasons for maintaining the invented tradition.

The concept of collective memory inspired Jan Assmann (2011), who put forth the notion of ‘cultural memory’, defining it as memory that takes on an external character. In order to preserve the memory of the past, the social group creates material and ritualistic media, which are nowadays referred to as ‘memory media’. Assmann also distinguishes communicative memory, which denotes the images of the past within the family passed down orally to younger generations. With the ‘First Reunion of the Feret Family’, there was a need to consolidate the knowledge and testimonies of people who witnessed history. Czesław’s accounts were written down in the family chronicle, which is the memory medium of the Feret family (fig. 4). Writing down memories and accounts is a symbolic transition of a group from oral to written memory in the context of passing on knowledge about the past. This moment is also a transformation of communicative memory into cultural memory (see: Saryusz-Wolska 2009: 27-31). The chronicle thus serves as an institutional memory medium, which constitutes the foundation of the group’s identity and a proof of family continuity. Thus, the memory of the past must be based on certain institutionalized memory media. Through the production of material memory media, the message of the past is no longer a witness testimony, but an institutional medium.

Referring once again to Shils’ view that traditions are creations considered to be unique and worth preserving because of their alleged age, regardless of whether its connection with the past is continuous, it can be said that the visual references to old prints with writing elements or to incunabula seen in the chronicle were intended to give the reunion participants the impression that they were dealing with something important, something to be treated with respect. At the reunion, it was carefully passed from hand to hand, because everyone was obliged to sign in. Discussions and stress accompanying the choice of words indicated how much importance the participants attached to the chronicle. Thanks to the visual references to the times of old, the awareness of the fact that it may survive for centuries has been sparked among the participants. Even the imitation of the binding placed on its spine, ensures – metaphorically speaking – the material durability of the chronicle. Such beliefs are expressed in the chronicle in the form of entries regarding family ties, traditions and memories. ‘We



Fig. 4. Family chronicle (author's private archive)

take the solemn oath that we will be faithful to the cultivation of family traditions'; 'The Feret family from Wierzbka Górna leaves their mark, promising to keep up the tradition'. Such entries prove that the participants themselves treat the reunion as a tradition, and the awareness of its novelty does not contradict the desire to maintain it. Several statements mention memory, but in different contexts. Some people said that 'the memories of the reunion will be remembered for a long time to come', testifying to the uniqueness of the meeting and the necessity of recalling it. Others promised to 'remember the living Ferets, especially our ancestors'. A good example of the effectiveness of the idea of the reunion was the entry left by nine-year-old Martynka, who pointed out that the most important family value is the memory of it and all forms that will remind about the past and family traditions. The entry reads as follows: 'I'm glad to be a part of the Feret family. I hope one day I will deserve the Feret award for remembering and recalling this great family'.

MECHANISMS FOR THE CREATION OF INVENTED TRADITION

To sum up, the 'First Reunion of the Feret Family' is an invented tradition with a structure based on two pillars. The first one is to create a relationship between the past and the present. Getting to know the past of the family and all its members allowed to start the process of consolidating the group and enabled individuals to identify with the family. The invented tradition promoted values that were necessary to maintain identity and tradition.

The second pillar on which the invented tradition was built is memory. The efforts and activities during the reunion shaped collective memory, since the knowledge of the family's past is based on the way it is presented at the reunion. Memory is also the only way to maintain a new tradition and family ties established thanks to it. This opportunity is complemented by the creation of material memory media such as family chronicles, brochures, pins, genealogical trees, anthems and Feret 2013 awards, since they serve the role of memorabilia of the event that shaped the Feret family. All the interpenetrating functions of the invented tradition were aimed at instilling in the participants a desire to act in accordance with tradition and family values.

Referring to the definition of the invented tradition of Wojciech Burszta (2004: 112-113), one can say that the 'First Reunion of the Feret Family' was a collection of cultural practices 'which express the memory of values, norms, events or figures from the past by way of their repetition and reminding living individuals today, in order to evoke the feeling that they are somehow connected with the history and tradition' of a given group. The modern invented tradition, which was a testimony to the changes and a symptom of the problems of the globalized world, proved to be their solution. In conclusion, let me quote Hobsbawm (1992: 2), who said that in studying the invented traditions, one explores a 'contrast between the constant change and innovation of the modern world and the attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and invariant'.

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Summary

The purpose of this article is to present the functioning of contemporary invented tradition on the example of the Feret's family reunion. The article contains the definitions of tradition, invented tradition, collective memory, cultural memory and memory space. It also describes the relationships between tradition and globalization. The analysis of the reunion depicts a construction of invented tradition and includes its features; it has been based on the family chronicle, the anthem and the presentation of the family's history. This particular invented tradition has built a social identity and composed a response to the problems of the present world.

Keywords: collective memory, invented tradition, identity, family reunion